

MILE END WEST YOUTH PROJECT

PROPOSAL

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PREFACE

The entire field of youth work in Canada, at the present, to be centred on alienation and drug abuse. In attempting to deal with the problems confronting youth, many well meaning social scientists and institutions have fallen into the (at times not so apparent) trap of treating symptomatic behaviour rather than the underlying malaise.

The youth Department of the International Y.M.C.A. has first hand experience of living in the trap. Through operating a drop-in centre for three years, we have come to the realization that professionals dealing with the problems of youth must confront the very basis of the problems; these are most often found outside of any of the existing youth subcultures.

It is for this reason that we decided to approach the problems faced by youth in Mile End West not as problems unto themselves, but as indicators of a more prevalent climate in the community.

The Mile End West Youth Project Proposal must be viewed as an extension of the presently operating Mile End West Project.

I. Introduction:

The International Y.M.C.A., located in the heart of the Mile End West district¹, has been for some time now involved with the youth of this area. Over the past years, the agency's programming has attempted to fill a void in the fields of recreation, informal education, and the evolution of leadership in the community.

The void has been growing larger. Traditional programming can no longer satisfy the needs of youth with whom we have contact. Properly organized swimming and basketball have little relevance to youth who are detached from their schools, have no prospect for stimulating work, and whose daily concerns are primarily centred around survival in a community which lacks the institutions that could possibly assist in the total development of the members of the community.

At this stage, it is necessary to clarify that the community to which I refer is a geographic one. The residents of this

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Mile End West is that area of Montreal bounded by Pine Avenue to Van Horne Avenue and St. Denis to Hutchison Avenue.

community are Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, French, and English.

It is these ethnic groups which have traditionally perceived Mile End West as a transitional area. During the past ten years, statistics² indicate that the area has become a permanent residence for a great many who settle there.

" In Canadian cities the ethnic pattern is more varied and less easily linked to urban decisions. Many cities are predominantly of either French or British descent and even in those cities with large numbers of New Canadians the problems of mutual cultural adjustment are not easily associated with urban growth and development programmes. The sources of dissatisfaction and stress are therefore varied and complex, difficult to identify and generalize. Many of the Canadian immigrants are already middle-class, white-collar families who disappear rapidly into the suburbs. Others, of half a dozen different national origins, are upwardly mobile, often achieving considerable economic success within a few years. They obscure the poverty, exploitation and acculturation difficulties of the remainder. Only when the successful and unsuccessful newcomers become sorted out, economically, socially and spatially, will those problems play a significant role in urban growth. "³

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Research Department, Montreal Council of Social Agencies, Sixty Major Study Areas and Their Comparative Socio-Economic Profiles in Metropolitan Montreal. (July 1968) Study area no. 21

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James and Robert Simmons, Urban Canada, The Copp Clark Publishing Company, (1969) Pg. 12.

Because of its previously transient nature, and low economic level, the area's institutions greatly neglect the needs of its members. The project shall define itself as the community animator organizing the youth of the various ethnic groups in an attempt to make the local institutions work for the area citizens.

II.

Theoretical Framework and
Statement of Problem

The Mile End West district is one of the grey areas of Montreal. Fifty-eight per cent of the families in the area earn less than \$1,000 per year.⁴

Immigrant children have adopted either English or French as their second language. The schools are poorly equipped to handle these children and the resulting effect is an extremely high

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Research Department, Montreal Council of Social Agencies, Sixty Major Study Areas and Their Comparative Socio-Economic Profiles in Metropolitan Montreal. (July 1968) Study area no. 21.

rate of high school, and in many cases, primary school drop outs.

Ten per cent of all Montreal youths are attending high schools.

In Mile End West the percentage is 3.75. Four per cent of Montreal youths are in post-secondary schools, while in Mile End West only one per cent attend these.⁵

An added area of stress for the youths of Mile End West is the cultural duality that exists between the home and the Canadian institutions in the area. The value system that exists within the family structure is often rejected by the young who are in the process of becoming Canadian.

It is within this framework that the project staff undertook to examine the problematic situation within the community and to apply the concepts of Community Development.

The process of Community Development is an evolutionary one.

An inherent part of this process is the historical and

cultural understanding of the community. In the paragraphs that follow we will outline the historical and cultural factors alive in Mile End West and the effect that these have had on the development of our theoretical framework.⁶

The initial stimulant to youth work in communities in and around Montreal was the heavy incidents of drug abuse. Our response followed the pattern of opening a drop-in centre and familiarizing ourselves with the lifestyle of the area's youth.

In this community, we perceived that the youth who made use of the centre held little hope for the future and led a neo-existentialist lifestyle. Dropping out of school was the pattern rather than the exception as were welfare and low income families, and drugs were one way of at least mentally getting out of that environment and feeling a part of something that is happening in America.

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For definition of Community Development, see Mile End West Proposal, Appendix, Page 5 (Approach).

In that perspective, we perceived drugs as being symptomatic of the general situation which these youth find themselves in the community. Running the drop-in centre was just not enough. We were providing a service rather than actively working on a solution.

At this stage we decided to focus our attention on issues relevant to the youths with whom we had contact. Our relationship with them took on the added dimension of jointly trying to understand and better the conditions within the community.

Since we were looking for the solution, the next stage was to examine all the contributing historical and cultural factors. After assessing some of these factors, we decided to adopt a new approach. Closing the drop-in centre, which in itself created hostility between the staff and the teens, followed.

To try and move through this hostility, we began talking to the youths about issues which by then we identified as relevant to them: employment, high school education and recreation in the community. Having spent most of their lives subdued by

these institutions, and then punished for not being able to bear that weight, these youth virtually did not respond to the kind of ideas we were initiating.

The one issue that drew a response was the writing of a Y.M.C.A. sponsored newspaper. The opportunity of creating an edition of this paper, comprised solely of their reactions to the high school situation, was attractive and challenging to the group, and presented very little long-term commitment to them. This two weeks of work pulled the group together around a specific task and placed them in a position where they were able to challenge each other's views and memories of their high school days.

With the cohesion that the success of the newspaper generated, we attempted at this point to follow through with a more permanent community newspaper. Yet, for this, the youth were faced with the responsibility of concentrating on their community, of making an effort to effectively communicate their dissatisfaction and concerns to the rest of the citizens. This was the kind of commitment which their experience has taught them they could ill-afford, both financially and ideologically. Paralleling this was the feeling that it should be the staff who must

initiate the work at this stage.

To overcome this, we began talking about work with the youth which could be easily accomplished. The issue of this kind which was most pressing was the organizing and running of the previously Y.M.C.A. operated summer Alley Programme.

For this programme, the staff has traditionally come from universities outside of the community. For the first time, to support the kind of work we had been trying to initiate, it was decided that these indigenous youth would be hired. This would provide an excellent opportunity for these teens to become involved in one form of community activity, and, at the same time, be provided with a steady income throughout the summer. In addition, keeping in mind the kind of long-term organization we intended to establish, the teens would now be in a position to create some degree of credibility with the adult groups in the community.

To accomplish this, we formed the Mile End West Youth Project whose primary and immediate concern became the organizing

of the Summer Alloy Programme for 1971.

The staff took the initiative of submitting a proposal to the Federal Government's Opportunities for Youth programme and obtained a grant that allowed us to employ nineteen of the area's youth. The programme had two distinct aspects: The day camp operated four days per week both in the city and on a donated farm. On Fridays of each week, we hold informal training sessions in which we tried to understand the direction the programme was taking, the behaviour of the children in the day camp, the behaviour of the staff, and possibly to channel that understanding into a constructive way of changing some of the things which they identified as negative influences on them and on their community.

The obstacles in making this connection between the responsibility to the self and to the community are inherent in the historical and cultural foundations of Mile End West.

The community of Mile End West has traditionally been the landing ground for immigrants arriving in Montreal. The youth with whom we are dealing are not recent immigrants. Most of them are either second, third or fourth generation Canadians. Because of that,

they have witnessed the arrival of various ethnic groups into Mile End West; they have witnessed various groups' mobility upwards in terms of accepted Canadian standards and they have stood by while the other ethnic groups moved on to "better" and more prosperous parts of Montreal. This is one historical fact that has a major significance on how these youth perceive their defeatism in relation to the values, standards and class of the Canadian society.

Along with the historical implications behind this fact, we have to remember that Mile End West is very much a part of the inner city of Montreal. As such, it suffers all the ills of inner city life.

These ills are further compounded by the fact that we are dealing with a predominantly immigrant population which is attempting to adapt to institutions within the community that are primarily aimed at the Canadian middle class. As such, those institutions make it difficult, and at times impossible, for the individual to cope.

A common reaction to this often impossible situation is a strongly

prevalent feeling of alienation. According to Fromm:

"Alienated man does not experience himself as an active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished 'thing', dependent on powers outside of himself unto whom he has projected his living substance." ⁷

For the youth of this area, alienation takes a predictable twist in its development in that their alienation is a part of a questioning sub-culture of youth, with all the implications that 1971 holds for a maturing individual.

Growing up in an environment which removes one from most decision-making, which houses institutions whose programming is generally irrelevant to the community's needs, puts one in a position of looking for some positive reinforcement.

For the youth, this reinforcement came in the form of being a

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(Ed.) Eric and Mary Josephson, Man Alone. (New York)
1962. Pg.55.

part of the 'cultural revolution' of the Youth of America.

The entire questioning of standards and values that the North American society is undergoing is very much a part of the lifestyle of inner city youth. Because of their alienation, they themselves are responding to the new values of the youth sub-culture. As such, they are strongly detached from the institutions that have contributed to the greatest extent in their alienation from their community.

The result is two groups, both of whom are alienated from those institutions, but who have perceived their roles in the community differently. One group of youth has decided to remain in school and use that as a means to "make it". The other group has left school, either financially forced to do so, or it has simply considered it the more appropriate choice.

In relation to this latter group of youth, we find ourselves in a bind. We are working with a group of people that has a sense of value that creates disenchanted with its environment. They are also, mainly through drugs, managing to

turn their thoughts inwardly. For them, the answer to community action and community problem solving lies in each individual's ability to turn inward, in each individual's ability to become 'good', and this in turn will make the community 'good'.

We are in this bind because what we are attempting to do is to create an environment which will make it possible for every individual to experience his potential and his goodness in that community. Many of the youth in this community adopted the new and different values of 'looking inward', but essentially rejected the other important part of the sub-culture of taking social action to create this kind of community. This latter value could not be adapted to their environment. With the history of poverty, defeat, and alienation from institutions, many had no option but to adopt those principles of the Youth Revolution which were best suited for their community.

It is for this reason that the project will have two distinct areas of involvement. In relation to the youth who are still attending school, the project shall attempt to work with them in identifying problems and organizing students, parents and teachers into working committees. These committees will attempt

to work towards solutions for common problems and effect change in areas of concern.

In dealing with the latter group, those out of school and largely unemployed, keeping in mind the historical background and the social forces within the community, the necessity of physically removing this group from the community became apparent.

If we are to be at all successful in organizing this particular group, then we must consciously challenge their value of isolated introspection. This task becomes almost impossible in their present environment which constantly reinforces that value.

This same force is prevalent in the group which remains in school, yet their presence in these schools is in itself an indication of their willingness to work within the established institutions.

III. Project Scope and Size

Continuing with the concept developed in the Theoretical Framework, the scope of the project shall focus on two distinct

areas of involvement:

A. Winter Work Camp

The Winter Work Camp is an experimental programme which was developed as a different and potentially more promising means to deal with the rather unique cultural experience of one segment of the youth of Mile End West.

The work camp will involve some 12-15 youths and one staff member working under a contractual agreement with a Laurentian camp to clear ski trails. The participants will live at the camp for five winter months (November 1971 to March 1972). They will be responsible to care for their communal cabin, pool part of their salaries each week for food and look after the basic needs that people living in such a setting require.

As such, basic day-to-day survival will become a new area of involvement. The participants will be responsible to winterize their cabin, for example, and work together to provide some 'household rules' to generate a harmonious way of living together.

The physical labour required under the contract will be carried

out on four days of each week. The remaining time will be directed towards developing more objective ways for the group to look at the analogous, although more sophisticated, need for survival in their own city community and to question the basis for that effort at survival.

Through this, we will attempt to examine the behaviour of the group members and to trace the development of this behaviour as it relates to the institutional order of their community: On what basis have the schools, churches and businesses in the area related to the youth; are these institutions responsible for the need existing to try to survive, emotionally and financially, or have they facilitated survival, providing for areas of involvement and decision-making in education, recreation and civil rights.

These sessions will consist of group discussions, guest speakers, and an appropriate library, all of which shall help to facilitate the questioning of the roles the institutions take in their community. This process shall be focused on channelling the participants' new ways of looking at themselves in relation to their area in the direction of community involvement when they return.

B. Work in Mile End West

Realizing that the youth who are attending school are to some degree committed to staying within the community, the project staff shall contact them around issues related to education and recreation in Mile End West. It will be the worker's task to develop high school committees which will focus their attention on actively dealing with identified problems.

Here the possible programming shall consist of, initially, the organizing and staffing of, the presently Y.M.C.A. operated, After School Programme (recreation in after school hours for the younger children of the area).

Initiating the After School Programme will place the group in a position of potentially becoming more involved with issues other than recreation and establishing themselves as a working group within the community.

C. Youth Corporation

To ensure some degree of success in the two areas outlined above,

the Youth Corporation will act as an integrating agent between the two groups and the rest of the community.

The corporation will consist of youth, unemployed as well as students, who, as members of the corporation, will make themselves available for any number of paying jobs needed in and around the community. As a logical development of the Winter Work Camp and the recreational activities in the city, the contractual work engaged by the corporation will include renovations, general maintenance, operation of day camps and a possible operation of a cooperative garage.

Since the basis for the corporation is of a cooperative nature, the income of these undertakings will be equally divided among its working members, with possible profits being channelled into community programmes.

Through the three areas outlined above, the project shall initially be in contact with some fifty of the area's high school aged youth. With the expansion of the various high school

committees and the growth of the corporation, the project will come into contact with at least fifty per cent of the area's youth. It is through this sort of contact that the project and its programming shall attempt to bring the youth of the various ethnic groups into a joint problem solving milieu.

IV. Objectives

Specific:

1. To develop within the community a Youth Corporation that shall evolve to become independent of the agency.
2. Through involving youth of various ethnic backgrounds in a common, problem solving milieu, attempt to instill a sense of community identification that will allow the youth to cope with and challenge, if necessary, the present social and economic conditions in Mile End West.

General:

1. To assist youth in identifying their problems and their causality, and through available resources attempt to bring

this understanding into dealing with community problems.

2. To create, among the youth, an awareness of their rights and to support the youth whenever they choose to exercise these.

V. Project Clientele

The project shall address itself to the youth (15-25 years of age) of the Mile End West area. This area of Montreal has a population of some 18,000 people and of these some 22,000 are under the age of twenty-five.⁸ It has been our experience that these youths have great concerns for the issues facing them and their community. It is a recognized fact that at this stage of their lives, they are more willing to place themselves in more questionable and uncertain situations than the adult community. It is with these thoughts in mind that the staff team selected,

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Research Department, Montreal Council of Social Agencies, Sixty Major Study Areas and Their Comparative Socio-Economic Profiles in Metropolitan Montreal, (July 1968) Study area no. 21.

as the project clientele, the youth of the area.

The area of Mile End is comprised of two distinct communities: the French community being East of St. Laurent, and the immigrant community being West of St. Laurent, the area known as Mile End West. The project staff shall recruit its clientele from both of these communities in an effort to introduce the immigrant youth to the Quebec milieu.

VI. Duration

The project, at this stage, has a projected duration of three years. During this time, the staff and clientele shall define needs and work on both short and long term solutions. (See Appendix, Goal Setting, for a comprehensive explanation.) The foreseen phases of operation are:

1. Continuing already established relationships
and development of short and long range goals.
(1971-72)
2. Establishment of Youth Corporation independent

of the Y.M.C.A. (1972-73)

3. Phase out of Y.M.C.A. involvement (1973-74)

VII. Work Plan for Fiscal Year

On the basis of our previous work in the community and through the needs identified by the youth contacts which the staff have established, the following is a tentative work plan for the up-coming year:

1. Secure funds to carry through with the proposed Winter Work Camp.

At the same time, the staff remaining in the city will increase contacts with high school students to organize and staff the After School Programme.

2. Initiate the process whereby the participants of the Winter Work Camp can begin to question their involvement in Mile End West. Programmes will be initiated at this stage (guest speakers,

films, focused sessions, assigned reading and discussion) to facilitate this learning.

At the same time, initiate this same process with those attending high school. Efforts will be made to establish working committees with the students through training sessions, reading material, etc. The emphasis at this stage will be to expand the students' area of involvement beyond the After School Programme and to begin to deal with concerns of education and civil rights through the committees.

3. With the understanding to which the participants of the Winter Work Camp will be exposed, develop ways and means of dealing with identified community problems. The concept of the Youth Corporation will be introduced at this stage to offer a financially and emotionally more secure means of maintaining the group's involvement upon their return from the work camp.

At the same time, ensure that the committees of high school students begin to actively deal with the identified concerns. Programmes can be foreseen here in terms of students' rights, a community

newspaper and expansion in recreation. Here, too, the concept of the Youth Corporation will be introduced as a means of continued involvement at the end of the school year.

4. To establish the Youth Corporation with the participants of the Winter Work Camp (now returned to the city) and the members of the high school committees. Efforts will be made at this stage to secure contracts for various kinds of employment for the members of the corporation.

One foreseen contract, the now annual Summer Alley Program, is anticipated for the corporation by summer, 1972.

5. The organizing and staffing of the Alley Program by the corporation will be the basis for now branching out into intense community involvement. It will be attempted, at this stage, to secure contracts for employment that will directly or indirectly benefit the community.

A contract of this nature can be foreseen in the operation of

of a cooperatively run garage.

At the same time, the members of the corporation will be at the stage where they are in a position, both financially and in terms of how the rest of the community views the youth, to actively confront those institutions within the community that fail to be sensitive to the needs and the changing nature of the area residents.

The reader is asked to refer to the Appendix for detailed explanations of the following areas:

1. Operational Setting
2. Outline of Social Development Programme
3. Coordination and Liason with Existing Resources and Services
4. Citizen Control
5. Leadership Training
6. Volunteers
7. Staff Orientation
8. Project Planning
9. Administration

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